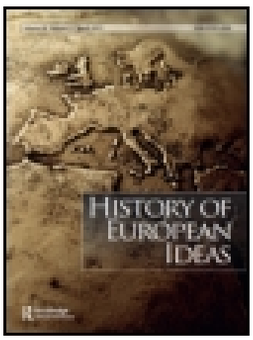
Editor's introduction



History of European Ideas

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rhei20

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To cite this article: Thomas Ahnert (2021): Editor's introduction: Nicholas Phillipson and the sciences of humankind in enlightenment Scotland, History of European Ideas, DOI: 10.1080/01916599.2021.1950309

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2021.1950309

Published online: 04 Aug 2021.

HISTORY OF EUROPEAN IDEAS
https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2021.1950309

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Editor's introduction: Nicholas Phillipson and the sciences of humankind in enlightenment Scotland

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Nicholas Phillipson died in Edinburgh's New Royal Infirmary on 24 January 2018, in the eighty-first year of his life. Over the course of a career of more than half a century, he had transformed scholarly understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment.[1] This special issue of *History of European Ideas* is intended to mark the immense contribution of his research.

All of the contributions gathered here engage with Phillipson's interpretation of the thought and culture of Enlightenment Scotland, and they are by scholars who knew him well, and whose work was inspired and influenced by his. Versions of some of the papers were presented at a memorial symposium in Edinburgh's Playfair Library on 1 March 2019, an event that was supported generously by the Scottish Philosophical Association, the University of Edinburgh's School of History, Classics and Archaeology, the Institute of Intellectual History at St Andrews, and an anonymous alumna of the University of Edinburgh.

The papers in this special issue are connected in particular by the theme of a 'Science of Man', which had been one of Phillipson's guiding interests in much of his research in the last two decades of his life. That theme is evident, for example, in his magisterial biography of Adam Smith,[2] in which Phillipson presented Smith's philosophical project as an attempt to construct such a 'Science of Man'. It also came to shape his approach to the thought of David Hume, whose bold declaration in the Preface to the *Treatise of Human Nature* that 'all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature'[3] was the starting point of a large research project from 2002 to 2006, which Phillipson directed together with the late Susan Manning, and which was funded by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust.

At the time of his death, Phillipson had been working on a major new history of the Scottish Enlightenment. Advanced drafts of several chapters for this book were among his papers, which are now being digitised by the Institute for Intellectual History at the University of St Andrews. These drafts and conversations with him in his final years suggest that his work on the Scottish Enlightenment had undergone a biographical turn in the last decade or so of his life, presumably as a result of his reflections on the genre of biography while writing his study of Adam Smith. In the draft manuscript of his unfinished book, he thus set out to study the history of the Scottish Enlightenment as the collective biography of a generation of thinkers, who were, in the main, born around 1720, and reached adulthood around the time of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. It is hoped that eventually it will be possible to present Phillipson's final reflections on the Scottish Enlightenment to a wider audience, in an appropriate format.

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[1]For a more detailed assessment of Phllipson's impact on Scottish Enlightenment scholarship, see Colin Kidd, 'The Phillipsonian Enlightenment', *Modern Intellectual History* 11/1 (2014): 175–90.

[2]Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith. An Enlightened Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

[3]David Hume, 'Introduction', in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), xv.

The aim of the essays collected here, however, is to reflect on and engage with the ground-breaking scholarship Phillipson published before his death. In his contribution, James Harris considers Phillipson's evolving analysis of David Hume's thought, and what it reveals of Phillipson's wider interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment. Harris shows how Phillipson's emphasis in his early work on the practical moralism of Hume allowed him not only to situate Hume in the social scene of the Scottish Enlightenment, but also to explain the relationship between the more 'abstruse' theories of his *Treatise of Human Nature* of 1739-40 and Hume's subsequent, less obviously philosophical writings, the *Essays* and the *History of England* especially. In his later work, on the other hand, Phillipson began to focus on Hume's 'Science of Man' as the basis for an empirical and non-Christian approach to human society that was continued by Adam Smith.

In his article, 'Beyond Anglicized Politeness', Robin Mills examines the reception in eighteenth-century Scotland of Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays. Phillipson had underscored the importance of Addison's writings as models of 'politeness', which were praised and imitated widely in Scottish Enlightenment culture. Mills expands on Phillipson's analysis by identifying the existence of several other uses of Addison's texts by eighteenth-century Scots, for a variety of purposes, and from several different perspectives – religious, political, and aesthetic.

Ryan Hanley's contribution focuses on Phillipson's notion of a 'Science of Man' in Scottish eighteenth-century thought. That 'Science of Man', in Phillipson's view, was derived not from *a priori* reasoning or theological principles, but from experience and matters of fact. A key question then was how an empirical, descriptive 'science' could perform a normative function and motivate virtuous actions. But, as Hanley emphasises, for Smith the possibility of virtue depended on an idea of exact propriety and perfection, which was derived from observation and experience, and which was essential in guiding the progressive moral formation of the individual.

The role of luck and trust in Adam Smith's thought is the theme of Sylvana Tomaselli's article. As she shows, Smith believed that humans were prone by their nature to overestimate greatly the likelihood of their own luck or good fortune, on which the success of their actions depended. Many passages in Smith's work were devoted to addressing the difficulties this caused. The consequence was that networks based on trust were all the more important in Smith's view for preserving human well-being as well as stable, functioning relationships among the members of a society.

Silvia Sebastiani's essay on Lord Monboddo concludes the special issue. Monboddo continues to be seen as one of the most puzzling and eccentric figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. But as Sebastiani shows, Monboddo's intellectual project was an example of a 'Science of Man', committed to empirical principles and based on particular matters of fact, to which Monboddo applied the juristic standards of proof he was familiar with as a judge.

It has often been commented that Phillipson's style as a scholar appeared to reflect the age he wrote about. Not just his fluent prose, but his entire *persona* or character seemed an exemplar of that refined and elegant sociability that he found, to use a favourite Phillipsonian phrase, 'fascinating' in his study of the eighteenth century. We hope the following essays represent a fitting tribute to a much-missed scholar, colleague, and friend.